



# Office of Communications

# Public Health News

---

241 N. Figueroa Street, Room 348 • Los Angeles, CA 90012 • Tel (213) 240-8144 • Fax (213) 481-1406 • [media@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:media@ph.lacounty.gov)

---

**For Immediate Release**  
November 20, 2006

**For more information contact:**  
Public Health Communications  
Tel (213) 240-8144 • Fax (213) 481-1406  
[media@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:media@ph.lacounty.gov)

## **New Food Safety Guidelines: Avoid Getting Sick From Your Own Meals**

### **New Cooking Recommendations for Poultry Highlight Need for Safe Food Handling During the Holidays**

LOS ANGELES – This holiday season health officials urge residents to learn and use safe food handling practices every day to prevent illnesses associated with food poisoning. This is in light of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) revised recommendations for cooking poultry to a minimum 165°F internal temperature throughout the bird instead of the previous recommendation to cook poultry to 180°F.

“Although the USDA revised cooking recommendations for poultry, this does not mean meats can be cooked less, it means just the opposite. Meats need to be cooked thoroughly to *at least* 165°F to prevent illness from bacteria such as, Salmonella,” said Los Angeles County Public Health Director and Health Officer Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, “Each year Public Health investigates cases of food poisoning during the holidays that are the result of undercooked food and poor food handling practices. This year do not let that happen to you and your family. People should follow instructions on package labeling for proper handling and cooking instructions.”

Raw turkey, chicken, or other meats can contain Campylobacter or Salmonella bacteria that cause diarrheal illness in people. The following cooking tips can assist cooks during the holiday season.

To thaw a turkey (by refrigerator, cold water or microwave):

- Place frozen turkey in original wrapper in the refrigerator (40 °F or below). Allow approximately 24 hours per 5 pounds of turkey. After thawing, keep turkey refrigerated for only 1-2 days.
- Place securely wrapped turkey in cold water and change the water every 30 minutes. Allow about 30 minutes defrosting time per pound of turkey. Cook immediately after thawing.
- Check to see if the turkey is not too large and fits comfortably in the microwave. Check manufacturer's instructions for the size of turkey that will fit in your oven, the minutes per pound, and the power level to use for thawing. Cook immediately after thawing.

To cook a turkey:

- When roasting a whole turkey, use a food thermometer to make sure it cooks to 165 °F. Insert the thermometer in the thickest part of the thigh, but not against the bone.
- For safety and uniform doneness, cook stuffing separately in a casserole dish and use a food thermometer to make sure it cooks to a temperature of 165 °F.
- For pre-cooked turkey dinners, eat within 2 hours or refrigerate components separately, then reheat to a temperature of 165 °F.

When purchasing a fresh turkey, plan to cook it within 1-2 days after purchase. **Do not buy fresh pre-stuffed turkeys.** If not handled properly, any harmful bacteria that may be in the stuffing can multiply very quickly. USDA recommends only buying frozen pre-stuffed turkeys that display the USDA or State mark of inspection on the packaging. These turkeys are safe because they have been processed under controlled conditions. Do not thaw frozen pre-stuffed turkeys. Cook from the frozen state. Follow package directions for proper handling and cooking.

“When preparing holiday meals or any meal, the first rule of food safety is to wash your hands well with soap and water, before, in-between, and after handling food items,” said Dr. Fielding. “Also, if you are ill with diarrhea or vomiting, you should not prepare food for others. Bacteria or viruses may be transmitted to the food you are handling and may make others sick.”

Other holiday food handling tips include:

- Wash fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating or cutting into them;
- Cook poultry thoroughly. The meat juices should be clear when cut into;
- Use a food thermometer. They take the guesswork out of cooking and ensure the food's internal temperature is high enough to kill harmful bacteria;
- Separate raw meats and poultry from other foods such as fruits and vegetables. Avoid cross-contamination by using separate cutting boards, knives, and platters for these foods;
- Keep hot foods hot. Use chafing dishes or pans with sternos or other heating devices, or keep foods in the oven at a temperature to ensure they remain at 135 °F or above. Do not prepare too much food ahead of a planned event unless proper cold or hot holding methods are in place.
- Keep cold foods cold. Refrigerate leftovers not eaten within 2 hours. Throw-out foods that should have been kept cold, but have been left out for more than two hours.

Raw or lightly cooked egg or egg products can cause food-borne illnesses and may be used in some salad dressings, cookie or cake batter, sauces, and beverages such as egg nog. Avoid eating uncooked items made with these and substitute pasteurized eggs when preparing them.

For more information, visit the USDA website at: <http://www.usda.gov/> and click on the Food and Nutrition link; then click on the Food Safety link or call their toll-free Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-674-6854. For the Hearing Impaired: TTY: 1-800-256-7072. You may speak with a food safety specialist — in English or Spanish — from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern time on weekdays year round. An extensive menu of recorded food safety messages may be heard 24 hours a day.

If you get a foodborne-illness, seek medical attention. Additionally, please contact the LA County Department of Public Health at 1-888- 397-3993 to report your illness.

The Department of Public Health (DPH) is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 3,800 employees and an annual budget exceeding \$650 million.

# # #